

God Is Love

...God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. *(1 John 4:16b)*

The statement that God is love, expresses the deepest sense of who God is and what he is like. Not only is love a characteristic of God, but he is love itself. Love has its origin in his being.

Because God is love, he made everything. He gave us life.

When we look at nature, we see amazing beauty, painstaking detail and order. The entire cosmos is perfectly integrated. Above all, man's nature—his free will, his conscience, his ability to love, think and create—reflects God's being.

And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. *(Genesis 1:31)*

You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit.
(Job 10:11-12)

What Is God's Love Like?

God's Love Is Personal & Perfect

The passages quoted above show that God gives us the gift of life and shares his love with us. His acting is love. It shows that the love of God is not simply an attribute, impersonal energy or the source of intense feelings (what people often think of love as). Love by its very nature, is deeply connected with the decision and will to always want the very best for someone. God wants the best for us and created everything so that it leads us to him—to his love.

God's Love Must Be Shared

Because God is love, he gives of himself. This giving shows us the sense of life, that is, to know God's love and to love him. This is why he made us. He wants us not only to experience his love, but to have a deep relationship with him and with others.

Jesus said:

The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
(Mark 12:29b-30)

God enables us to love with all our heart. This is possible when we know, accept and experience God's perfect love. In spite of our sins, we can understand and long for God's love, because he made us good.

God's Love Is the Only Love That Can Truly Fulfil Us

God made us to be loved perfectly by him—to be respected and treasured by him. People often seek this

love in other people, and are disappointed. Even if we were perfect we would not be able to fulfil this longing in each other. Our limited love can never be enough to give each other the true identity and value that only God can give. Only God is able to fulfil our desire to be loved perfectly. He alone is the source of such love.

Blaise Pascal (Physicist/Philosopher 1623–62) wrote about the danger of looking for perfect love in man: “I am not the end of any, and I have not the wherewithal (means) to satisfy them. Am I not about to die? And thus the object of their attachment will die....” [1]

People seek love in many places. To be loved is the most central goal in life, to be valued, accepted, honoured. Consciously or unconsciously, they search for their identity in this. God’s love is different. God doesn’t make us the centre of everything, unlike people do when they dote on each other. God teaches us that being fulfilled doesn’t come by being put in the centre, but by giving ourselves selflessly. We learn this from him. He doesn’t want to be praised because of selfish reasons, but because we can’t live a life filled with meaning and sense if we are not filled by him—the source of love.

When people try to find this perfect love in other people they put man in God’s place. This is unfair to man and unfair to God. Man cannot fulfil their expectations—he is too limited, and fallible, and this expectation is too great a burden for him to bear because he himself needs this perfect love from God.

If a person rejects God, then their identity and value in life must be taken from what they do or how others accept them. They feel the need to be loved, but will often be disappointed when they look for this in people. It puts a great strain on relationships and takes away the freedom of the other person. Such love is selfish, not selfless.

God’s Love Is Pure & Selfless

Pure, selfless relationships between people are only possible if they are based on God’s pure and selfless love.

■ We love because he first loved us. (*1 John 4:19*)

God’s love enables us to love without expecting something back, independently of how I feel or of what is easier for me, without selfish desires and looking for honour from the other one. In such relationships, I don’t need to look for any acceptance or honour or fulfilment of desires from the other one, because God gives me what I really need. I am then free to share this love joyfully with others.

God’s Love Says the Truth

The Old Testament quotes an ancient prayer, in which we find sentiments which all of us have experienced at some stage from others, or perhaps noticed in ourselves....

■ They only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse. (*Psalms 62:4*)

True love is pure because it is based on truthfulness—even if saying the truth is not always easy or accompanied by good feelings.

■ [Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (*1 Corinthians 13:6*)

A doctor may prescribe medicine which tastes bitter, but he does it because he knows it will make the patient well. It would not be love not to give it to the patient just because he wants to please the patient or make them feel good for the moment. Likewise true love gives a person what they need most, and not necessarily what they would prefer.

God's Love in Jesus

God Became Man Because He Loves Us

While creation and the being of man are great testimonies of God's love, the greatest testimony of all is that he sent his son Jesus to us. He came so close to us to show through his life and death how much he loves us and wants to save us. He demonstrated his great mercy for us by giving us the possibility to be forgiven and set free from sin.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. (*1 John 4:9*)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (*John 3:16*)

Through Jesus We Are Reconciled to God

To accept God's love means to accept Jesus, and to accept how sinful we have been and how much we need his forgiveness.

God gives us everything we need, and gave us many things and abilities for us to love and do good. When we sin we abuse these good gifts from God, using them for evil, without respecting what they were entrusted to us for. A son who squanders all the inheritance his loving, caring father gave him on evil pleasures dishonours and rejects his father. Likewise we dishonour and reject God when we don't ask God how he wants us to live.

When we get to know Jesus, he shows us through his life and death how much we rejected God through our sin. He leads us to repentance and forgiveness if we accept him.

This acceptance is expressed not only in words and beliefs, but in our whole attitude, and by letting him change our lives.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.... (*Ephesians 2:4-5*)

To Accept Jesus Means to Accept What He Commanded

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (*John 14:15*)

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (*John 14:21*)

God loves us so much that he did not only send his son to save us, but he gave us commandments through Jesus, that we might live according to them and live as Jesus lived.

Jesus Commanded Us to Love Everyone

Often people limit their love to people from their particular group of friends or family—according to their own criteria of who they find “lovable”.

To love everyone means to want the best for everyone without favouritism—not preferring some people more than others. Only this kind of love is selfless.

This was not a completely new commandment. The books of Moses write:

You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbour: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbour, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. (*Leviticus 19:15-18*)

You have heard that it was said, “*You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.*” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (*Matthew 5:43-48*)

Jesus’ Love Means Saying the Truth

Jesus demonstrated what it means to love everyone through his whole life and death. He knew that what people need most is to be reconciled with God, and that what hinders people and makes them blind is sin. His love included, therefore, that he clearly rejected hypocrisy and led people to assess their lives before God. Jesus lived without sin, and therefore his life was a mirror which showed people who they really were. For those who accepted him, they could be led to repentance and forgiveness, but many rejected him because they did not want to be confronted with his righteousness and his honest love. He told everyone the truth plainly, and showed them what they have to change. For this reason many hated him, and finally they killed him. Today, many reject him and the truth he proclaimed as well.

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me.... But because I tell

the truth, you do not believe me.” (*John 8:42a, 45*)

...and that is why he was rejected.

We can see through Jesus’ life that true and honest love is not necessarily attractive or fascinating (to those who seek their own pleasure) or connected with intense emotions. Unfortunately God’s love is not liked by everyone and you cannot help or win everyone with this love.

Jesus’ Love Can Only Fully Unfold in the Church

And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (*Mark 3:34-35*)

If people reject love, they are separated from God and from each other. People who do not accept God’s love cannot love in a truly selfless way.

Only those who want to love the source of love and be nourished by him, will want or be able to give each other his love.

In true, biblical Church, everyone has decided to live by the love of God – to serve with their whole life and let themselves be served. **It is love which binds them together**, not a man-made hierarchy or an organisation. If their love grows cold, then the Church disintegrates. If they love each other, then the Church grows and matures.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. (*John 15:12-14*)

Those who love Jesus will share their lives. This is the core teaching and practice of the entire New Testament.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (*John 13:34-35*)

Unfortunately it is very hard to find people who want to live this out today. Individualism, egotism and consumerism are rife in our religious world. When people do not share their lives in this kind of love, they show that they are not his disciples.

If anyone says, “I love God”, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (*1 John 4:20-21*)

Love is a commandment. It encourages us and gives us hope that it is possible to follow Jesus and to live in love, even today. He wouldn't have commanded this love if it were not possible. On our own, we would not be able to do it, but with his help, we can—we can fulfil the only real aim of life and find the only love which can fulfil us. This is what we were created for. Without it, life is empty and senseless.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. (*Acts 4:32*)

We have the example of the first Christians in the book of Acts. They loved each other so much that it was very natural for them to share their whole lives, including their possessions. They learned this love from Jesus and the apostles. They met every day in their homes, and fought for one another's spiritual lives.

This is the kind of love that Christians must have for each other. Only in this way can they really be a light for the world, showing that Jesus set us free from sin, and that he works in us with a power that the world (including the religious world and so-called churches) does not know and cannot imitate.

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth....(*1 John 3:18-19a*)

Are you searching for the only real aim of life? Do you practise this love?

We would love to be able to share it with you too! If there are some thoughts or questions that you have about this or other articles you have read on this website, please get in touch.

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Footnotes

1. Pascal, B. (1910). *Thoughts*. (W. F. Trotter, Trans.). New York: P. F. Collier and Son.

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